

# UK statement on 3 March: Conference on Disarmament

Madam President

Thank you for convening this plenary this morning. It is a valuable opportunity to reflect on what we have heard from our high level visitors this week, and what it means for the work of our Conference.

As Lord Ahmad told this Conference on Monday, Russia's unprovoked and premeditated attack against Ukraine, a sovereign, democratic state, casts a dark shadow over our work. The ultimate objective of this Conference is to contribute to international peace and security and to prevent war. So when one member of this Conference invades another member, we cannot stay silent.

In the last week, Ukraine has suffered horrific attacks. Missiles and air strikes have torn through apartment blocks. Innocent people including children have lost their lives and the Ukrainian people have endured widespread suffering. The invading Russian armed forces have bombarded civilian targets, including residential areas. They are responsible for hundreds of civilian casualties, including growing numbers of children.

As President of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the United Kingdom is in particular gravely concerned about reports of the use of cluster munitions. More generally, we have been working closely with a large number of partners to expedite an International Criminal Court investigation into Russian war crimes in Ukraine, including its use of indiscriminate force against Ukrainian civilians.

As a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, Russia has a particular responsibility to uphold international peace and security. Instead, it is violating the borders of another sovereign country and repudiating the principles that every country has committed to uphold. It is now vital that Russia urgently de-escalates and withdraws its troops. It must be held accountable and stop undermining democracy, global stability, and international law.

The UK and our international partners stand united in condemning the Russian government's reprehensible actions, which are an egregious violation of international law and the UN Charter and show flagrant disregard for its commitments under the Budapest Memorandum and the Minsk Agreements.

The UK stands with Ukraine and will always defend the Ukrainian people's right to choose their own destiny. We are joined in our outrage by friends and allies around the world. We will work with them – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine is restored, and that Russia is held accountable for its aggression.

We also condemn Russia's campaign of disinformation, which has included

numerous attempts at staging false pretexts for war. Most notable amongst them for this Conference is the ridiculous claim, repeated by the Russian Foreign Minister here on Tuesday, on nuclear weapons. It is important to re-state the facts. Ukraine acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1994 as a non-nuclear weapon state, and voluntarily returned to Russia the nuclear weapons that were on its territory from the time of independence from the USSR. In doing so, Ukraine received security assurances from the United States, the UK and Russia in the Budapest Memorandum against threats or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine – assurances which Russia has flagrantly disregarded. There is no evidence whatsoever that Ukraine has been developing or seeking to develop nuclear weapons, and it is shameful that the Russian government continues to conduct this sort of misinformation operation in a transparent attempt to justify the unjustifiable. No, let us be clear: this is President Putin's war of choice.

In a similar vein, Russia's false statements in the lead-up to their premeditated invasion about chemical weapons attacks being prepared by Ukraine are another example of this type of disinformation. If any country represented in this room has a track record of using, or covering for others' use of chemical weapons, it is the Russian Federation. Let me remind them that the world is watching their actions closely.

Let me now offer some reflections on the implications of these developments for our work here in the Conference on Disarmament, and in the disarmament machinery more generally.

First, as we all know, it is impossible to disentangle work on disarmament from the prevailing security environment. That cuts both ways: Russia's aggression will clearly have an impact on the security calculations of other countries. But it also makes it more important than ever for the international community to revitalise our commitment to arms control and disarmament.

That must start with consolidating and strengthening our existing frameworks, and with calling out non-compliance. This year, we very much hope to finally hold the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. We must seize the opportunity to strengthen both those vital Conventions.

Second, in periods of heightened international tension we must continue to build trust and reduce the risk of conflict and escalation through misinterpretation and miscalculation. Nowhere is this more important than on nuclear issues. The UK remains firmly committed to making progress with other NPT Nuclear Weapon States on disarmament and strategic risk reduction. All States Parties to the NPT recognise the "devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war", as the preamble to that Treaty puts it. Reducing the risk of nuclear war is amongst the foremost responsibilities of the Nuclear Weapon States. The UK takes its responsibilities seriously and calls on the other nuclear powers to stand by

those words, and the statement we jointly adopted only two months ago, and engage seriously in efforts to reduce the risk of misinterpretation and miscalculation.

Finally, we need to look again at those areas of arms control where the rules are weakest, or where escalations are most likely to break out. For the Conference on Disarmament, there are two key areas; they are familiar, but they bear repeating. First, we must immediately commence negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Second, it is particularly important to make progress on work to prevent an arms race in outer space in a holistic manner and avoid a narrow focus on the placement of weapons in space. The UK-led approach on responsible space behaviours aims to avoid miscalculations and escalation that could lead to conflict and ensure that our discussions and negotiations keep pace with fast-moving technology developments and includes all State threats in space and on Earth.

It is down to all of us to work together on the issues we face with a constructive attitude to secure a safe, peaceful and more prosperous world for generations to come. The Subsidiary Bodies give us a good opportunity to get into the detail of these and other related points.

For today, though, let me conclude by reiterating the UK's solidarity with the President, government and people of Ukraine in their hour of extreme need. Their courage and determination is an inspiration to us all. As yesterday's vote in the General Assembly showed clearly, the world stands with them.